



FARMWORKER LEGAL SERVICES

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**Statement of Daniel Inquilla
Co-Managing Attorney, Farmworker Legal Services
Regarding House Bills 5301 through 5310**

**Michigan House Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security Committee
327 House Office Building
March 28, 2006**

I am the co-managing attorney of Farmworker Legal Services located in Van Buren County, outside of Bangor. We are a legal aid office that assists low-income migrant and seasonal farmworkers with civil legal issues. Most of our clients and their families are immigrants.

I am also a Commissioner on the Michigan Commission on Spanish-Speaking Affairs. I am also here to represent their views.

One of the areas in which my office assists our clients is immigration. We advise farmworkers as to the types of immigration benefits that are available to them and their family members, and we assist with certain types of applications that grant residency, work authorization, citizenship, and benefits for abused spouses and children.

As someone who sees many immigrants and many immigration statuses, I have a particular interest in House Bills 5301 through 5310. The bills permit state scholarships and grants only to U.S. citizens and Legal Permanent Residents, or green card holders.

One main concern that we have with the bills is that they seem to imply that the only legal immigration status that a student may have that is capable of contributing to the state of Michigan is Lawful Permanent Residency.

Immigration law is a complex set of statutes, regulations, and policies. Congress has established dozens and dozens of immigration statuses, and often creates new ones. There are over 40 categories just for immigrants who can be granted work authorization but who are not Legal Permanent Residents. There are even more immigration statuses of immigrants who do not work.

In addition, the process for becoming a Legal Permanent Resident can take years of waiting in a backlog of applications. A Michigan student who does not have Legal Permanent Residence at the time that he or she would enter college or graduate school may gain that status soon afterwards. Not having access to the opportunity to earn scholarships or grants at the time that they would enter the educational institution places them at a disadvantage that is due to something out of their control.

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These bills would eliminate the opportunity for students to earn the right to those scholarships and grants, just like any other student would be able to do. Immigrant students are not currently put at a greater advantage than those students who are citizens – they would simply have the same opportunity to show that they are qualified and have the potential to contribute to the state of Michigan. Having a true merit-based system of awarding benefits means that all students who have the merits should be on equal footing.

My office also assists immigrants who are victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, as well as children who are temporary wards of the state due to abandonment, neglect, or child abuse. Federal immigration law permits all of these categories of immigrants some level of protection and immigration status, although they would not be considered Legal Permanent Residents.

One of them is Lilia, 20 years old, who has been granted a provisional status by the Immigration Service due to domestic violence that her father committed. Included among the pattern of abuse was trying to run down Lilia's mother with a car. Another young woman is Blanca, an 18-year old who was also granted provisional status due to pervasive domestic abuse committed by her father.

Both of these young ladies graduated from Michigan high schools and want to go to college, and they will be able to apply for Legal Permanent Residence in three or four years. They are currently searching for funds that would enable them to attend college. Yet students like them would be denied under these bills from proving that they are qualified for those benefits.

The state of Michigan needs students like this who want to get an education and want to contribute to this state. Michigan needs every student who can possibly help the state to compete in today's world.

The legislature is currently considering establishing rigorous high school graduation requirements, to ensure that Michigan students will have a quality education in math, science, social studies, and English and will be ready for college.

Passage of the bills before this committee today would contradict the reasoning behind those curriculum changes. These bills would essentially be saying that we do not want some students to succeed, or that we do not want Michigan to benefit from the contributions that these students could make to our economy and to our society.

I believe that House Bills 5301 through 5310 would be a disappointing step backwards for the children of this state and for the competitiveness of this state.